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The Peace of Zion:

A

DISCOURSE

PREACHED BEFORE

THE GENERAL SYNOD

OF THE

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN U. S.

WINCHESTER, VA., MAY 22, 1853.

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PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

GETTYSBURG:

PRINTED BY H. C. NEINSTEDT,
1853.

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PREFACE.

THE following discourse is given to the public at the request of a number of those who heard it, and were pleased to express the conviction of its being well calculated to diffuse over the church the pacific and fraternal spirit, which characterized the body before whom it was delivered. As it was the Synodical Sermon, required by a standing rule from the president of the preceding Synod, the speaker naturally selected a line of thought, relating to the general state and emergencies of the church. And as our beloved Zion has of late years been somewhat agitated by numerous, and we doubt not, well meant efforts, to disturb the liberal and apostolic doctrinal basis of her General Synod, and it was feared the present meeting might reflect these dissensions; our text and subject were deemed appropriate.

The late meeting of the General Synod was distinguished by several interesting features. In the *first* place, it was a most peaceable, harmonious and fraternal one; precisely like the former conventions of this body, before the theological diversities of recent date had affected the peace of our church. All seemed to have come to this meeting with a desire to exercise charity, and promote harmony. Doubt-

less the comparison of views, which had taken place in the **Lutheran Observer** and other papers of our church, had favored this result, by convincing the brethren of the non-essential nature of our differences; whilst the liberal and enlightened stand taken by the **Pennsylvania Synod**, in her adhering resolutions in favor of the unaltered **Constitution** of the **General Synod**, had no little influence in calming the apprehensions of some who feared an attempt to change it. *Another* feature was the talented and spiritual character of our lay representation. Much of the speaking and business was done, and well done by these beloved brethren, a pleasing omen of their more general and active participation in the grand enterprises of the church in future. A *third* feature was the practical character of this Synod. The mass of the brethren seemed determined for action, and resolved to accomplish more than heretofore, for the cause of the Redeemer. The *fourth* feature was the return of our brethren of the **Pennsylvania Synod**, after a separation of thirty years. They had been prominent in the original formation of the **General Synod**, in 1819 and 1820, and had attended one regular meeting in 1821; but then, on account of some popular misapprehension and clamor in their churches, receded from us in the spring of 1823. In the meantime, some of their individual ministers and churches had co-operated actively in the enterprises of the **General Synod**. Of late years, this sympathy

had become almost general, and the way had been prepared by a kind Providence, for their formal return to our midst. It was a subject of special congratulation, that they returned after a synodical expression of satisfaction with the Constitution of the General Synod, and of a firm determination to maintain it inviolate. With this determination, almost the entire General Synod accord, thus affording a just ground to anticipate harmony of future counsel, and increased efficiency in efforts to build up the various institutions of the church, to supply our numerous waste places with the everlasting gospel, and in every proper way to promote the kingdom of our divine Redeemer.

That all the sentiments of the following discourse will meet with general approbation, it were unreasonable to expect. Yet we volunteer the assurance to our dissentient brethren, that in no case was it our object to offend, but in all, to speak the truth in love. And whilst we claim the right, as Luther did, to search the Scriptures for ourselves, and to worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience; we most freely concede the same right to others, and regard them as good Lutherans, so long as they find in Scripture the *essential features* (*Grundwahrheiten*, in the language of the Pennsylvania Synod) of doctrine and practice, which Luther found there, and which are contained in the Augsburg Confession. A few notes have been added, to confirm the posi-

tions of the discourse. Commending these pages to the blessing of a gracious Providence, they are submitted to the church, in whose service the writer has spent his life, and for whose highest and best interests he still delights to labor.

DISCOURSE.

ACTS IX: 31.—*Then had the churches rest (εἰρήνην, peace) throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, and were edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.*

MY BRETHREN:—What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or, what can a man give in exchange for his soul? This was one of the solemn utterances of him who spake as never man spake, of the Son of God, the Savior of the world. He thus proclaims the salvation of a single soul, as outweighing in importance the value of a world. However largely, therefore, men may descant on their material interests and possessions, their railroads, canals and steamboats, their beds of coal and copper, of lead and silver, and even on the golden mines of California and Australia; however glowingly they may expatiate on their incalculable productiveness, their tendency to satiate a nation with every imaginable luxury and comfort; their importance dwindles into nothing, compared with the value of one immortal soul, of one never-dying spirit. For, when all these objects of sensuous enjoyment have passed away, when the elements shall be consumed with fervent heat, and the earth, with all its golden treasures, be burned up, the soul shall endure, yea, must forever live, either basking in the

sunshine of the Almighty's favor, or agonizing beneath the weight of his displeasure, with demons and accursed spirits in the regions of despair! For

“The sun is but a spark of fire,
A transient meteor in the sky,
The soul, immortal as its sire,
Shall never die.”

How important then is that office, whose faithful incumbents are the ambassadors of God to these souls! How important every *congregation* of such immortal beings, every church of God, convened to listen to the message of heaven, which must prove a savor of life unto life, or of death unto death to them! How much more important every *Synodical* meeting, consisting of pastors and lay-delegates of perhaps a hundred such congregations, assembled, not only to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ, but also to deliberate on the interests of the many thousands of souls embraced within their churches. But how far more important still, my brethren, is the assemblage of this *General Synod*, constituted by delegates of district Synods, and representing not merely individual churches, but entire Synods of churches, acting for many hundreds of ministers, for a thousand churches, and hundreds of thousands of these immortal souls! How desirable that the love of Christ should constrain us in all our deliberations, that the Holy Spirit of the Father and the Son should guide all our decisions, that a just estimate of the immortal interests confided to us, should fill us

with a proper sense of our responsibility. How should we task all our powers to advance the kingdom of heaven upon earth, and, in general, to promote that state of things most favorable to the “edification of the churches,” to their “walking in the fear of the Lord,” and the “comfort of the Holy Ghost,” and “being multiplied.” In our text we have the inspired declaration, that a state of *peace* or *rest* promotes these happy results. We therefore invite your attention to

The advantages and means of securing peace to the churches.

“Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.”

In these words does one of those remarkable historians, who without classic training or scientific instruction, have recorded the wonderful incidents of the gospel history with a directness, fidelity and impartiality unequalled by a Xenophon or Herodotus among the ancients, or by a Mosheim, a Schröck or Neander among the moderns, hold up to our view a most important fact, a law of ecclesiastical progress, a principle of church extension. A few preliminary explanations will prepare us for the subsequent discussion of this important theme.

“*Then,*” says the evangelist, had the churches rest or peace, that is, about nine years after the death of

the Savior, and soon after the conversion of Paul. Probably it was during the three years which the great apostle, as is evident from his language to the Galatians,* spent in Arabia, perhaps chiefly in reviewing his former life, in reflecting on his wonderful conversion, and the obligations it imposed upon him, and probably in verifying in the prophecies of the Old Testament, the messiahship of that Jesus, who had miraculously appeared to him on the way to Damascus, and changed the whole current of his life by the solemn appeal, "*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*" Doubtless he was also employed in digesting plans for the future labors of his life.

"Then had the churches† rest." The original term†† here rendered rest, more properly signifies "*peace*," and embraces several specifications. Some-

* I: 17, 18.

† Our text says, "Then had the churches rest," employing the plural number, thus recognizing, as our early reformers justly perceived, each congregation of christians as a complete church of God. This is done in other passages also, as in Acts 15: 41; where Paul is represented as travelling through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches; and 16: 5; "and so were the churches established in the faith." It is, however, worthy of remark, that some writers have adopted the singular form "church," although on very slight critical grounds; apparently swayed by dogmatical and ecclesiastical predilections for a passage to favor the various synthetic combinations of churches into *stated* judicial Synods and councils. These, however, as history attests, grew up after the apostolic age, and though useful in themselves, were unhappily perverted to the exclusion of the people from participation in the government of the church, and ended, though not necessarily, in the dominion of popery.

†† εἰρήνη.

times it indicates that inward peace of soul resulting from regeneration, as in the passage, "being justified by faith, we have "*peace*" with God," &c. At others it expresses the counterpart of that scourge of humanity, war, as in the Apocalypse,* where we are told, "power was given to him that sat on the red horse, proceeding from the second seal, to take away "*peace*" from the earth, that they should kill one another." War is therefore the science of killing one another, and peace its counterpart, or, exemption from this curse. Sometimes it signifies freedom from strife or contention, as in Ephesians,† "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." And finally, it imports exemption from persecution, as in our text. Then had the churches "*rest*" throughout all Judea, and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied."

With these explications, let us proceed to discuss our theme. The text explicitly affirms the fact, or law of Christ's kingdom, that peace, or rest, promotes the edification and extension of the church. This fact we accordingly assume in our discussion, on the authority of inspiration. The mode of its influence shall chiefly occupy our attention.

1. *Peace, as the opposite of war*, favors the progress of religion. God is a God of peace, and not of war. He is the fountain of peace. The perfec-

* 6 : 4.

† 4 : 3.

tions of his own nature are at peace with each other; and as all his creative productions are homogeneous with them, they cannot produce war, until some being whom he has endowed with free agency, abuses the trust confided to him, and transgresses his all-perfect laws. Does the transgression relate to his duties to the great ruler of the universe, then is it rebellion against God. Does the violation refer to the rights of his brother man, it is theft, or robbery, or murder; and if nations mingle in the strife, it is *war*. War, in its very conception, is, therefore, always sin, and justly did the apostle James affirm, "whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts, that war in your members? Ye lust and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain." But as war is always a state of sin, at least in one party, and generally in both; it cannot be favorable to holiness, or to the extension of religion, which consists in the diffusion of holiness. On the contrary, war in its very nature, is the greatest possible obstacle to the progress of religion. Napoleon himself has justly characterized it as "the trade of barbarians." It excites the destructive and savage propensities of man. It requires him to imbrue his hands in his brother's blood! Even if contending in a righteous cause, when men are excited to intensity by efforts to save their lives, to protect their families and firesides; they will not, and cannot devote much atten-

tion to the duties of religion, nor deliberately weigh its claims, if they formerly neglected them. The love of military glory also is an all-absorbing passion.—The Napoleonic wars, during their two decennia of blood and slaughter, have engrossed more of the attention of Europe and America, than has been devoted to the cause of religion in a century! And at this day, more than a quarter of a century after the hero of these fields of blood departed to his dread account from a lone barren isle on a far distant ocean, when an Abbot paints his exploits in living colors, and a Harper casts them by hundreds of thousands broadcast over the land, they are sought with avidity, and admired with unabated enthusiasm. So deeply seated in the depraved heart of man, is this military delusion!* Even the history of our own Revolutionary war, though on a smaller scale, confirms our position. Listen to the language of Dr. Helmuth, one of the venerable patriarchs of our American church, dated August 25th, 1775, soon after Gen. Gage landed at Boston with nine thousand men: “Throughout the whole country great preparations for war are making, and almost every person

* We should do injustice to our own convictions, if we attributed the popularity of Abbot's Bonapartean sketches entirely to the popular admiration of military exploits. Much of it may be traced to other features of the hero's character, and some, we trust, to a benevolent pleasure in finding so many civic and social virtues attributed to him, whether in all cases justly or not. Still the grand feature of attraction, doubtless is, the halo of military glory encircling his brow.

is under arms. The ardor is indescribable which is manifested in these melancholy circumstances. Quakers and Menonites take part in the military exercises, and in great numbers renounce their former religious principles. The hoarse din of war is hourly heard in our streets, and *the present disturbances inflict no small injury on religion.* Every body is constantly on the alert, anxious, like the ancient Athenians, to hear the news; and amid the mass of news, the hearts of men are, alas, *closed against the good old word of God !** In short, if our time, or the tenor of our subject admitted, it were easy to demonstrate that aggressive war, which commenced with rebellion in heaven, and with murder on earth, is, in its very nature, hostile to religion, withdrawing the attention of the community from the cause of God, from the institutions of benevolence, and from the missionary enterprise; whilst it consumes the resources of the population, and fans the flame of unholy and vindictive passions. Yea, whilst we affirm the duty even of the christian, to defend his country against actual invasion, for the same reasons, and with the same feelings, that he protects his family against the midnight assassin; yet even such a war is a great evil, and decidedly hostile to the progress of religion. The fact, that the desolations of war have, in a few instances, taught an afflicted people lessons of humility and dependence on God, does

* Hist. American Lutheran Church, p. 24.

not change its nature, but merely exemplifies the divine prerogative of educing good from evil, and making the wrath of man to praise him. Of course, *peace*, the counterpart of all this evil, must be good. It affords to individuals and the community, more leisure to attend to the claims of the gospel, to reflect on the eternal destiny of that immortal soul, which is of greater value than the whole world. It removes the unnatural tension of the vindictive passions, and places the mind in a more favorable state for rational, that is, religious reflection. It affords time and means to devise and execute schemes of benevolence, it enables the church to gather information concerning the heathen world, and prosecute her plans of progressive evangelization, until Jesus Christ, who was ushered into this world by angelic legions, as the "prince of peace," shall have established his kingdom of peace, and righteousness, and brotherly love over all nations, and wars and rumors of war shall happily be heard of no more.

2. For the same general reasons, *peace*, or rest from religious *persecution* favors the progress of religion. That the blood of martyrs is the seed of the church, is a maxim, which indeed has wrapped up in it an important truth; yet, if unconditionally interpreted, it is erroneous. The minds of the persecuting party, ordinarily constituting the great majority, are under the general malignant influences of aggressive war. Often they become even more infuri-

ated by the delusion instilled into them by their priestly guides, that they are doing battle in the cause of God, that the victims of their fiendlike rancor are the enemies of God, and therefore heaven will delight in their torture and extermination! This supposition alone will account for the inhuman cruelties of the ancient heathen persecutions, and the still more fearful, and cold blooded, and systematic inhumanities, practised by the Romish church upon the Waldenses and others, as well as by her bloody inquisition for centuries past, on all those of her own communion, who doubted or rejected any of her superstitions, or refused submission to their priestly masters! That the fiendlike state of mind, implied in such persecutors, cannot favor the religion of the meek and lowly Jesus, who forbade his disciples to draw the sword, needs no proof.

Nor is the influence of persecution on its *victims* favorable to the cause of religion. It terrifies weak believers, and often leads them to apostatize from the truth. It prevents the irreligious from paying any attention to the claims of the gospel, when it must be done at the hazard of life. When persecutors, like the Tarsian Saul, make havoc of the church, christians have little opportunity to meet for worship, or to attend on the public means of grace. A few of the most daring, may congregate and conduct religious exercises in caves and mountain thickets, in garrets and cellars; yet the great majority do not

participate in these meetings. And since their persecutors do not allow them the use of the Bible, even in their private dwellings, as was of late exemplified by persecuting Rome, in the case of the Mardaii, they will naturally decline in piety. God does indeed often deduce good even from this evil. When the disciples were scattered abroad by persecution, they became missionaries of their holy religion, and the constancy of some may be the means of converting others. Yet this is not generally the case to any great extent; and the history of eighteen centuries of persecution, confirms the doctrine of our text, that when *"the churches have rest, they are edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, are multiplied."*

3. Again, *ecclesiastical peace, rest or peace from intestine strife and angry controversy, favors the edification and growth of the church.*

It is indeed true, we are commanded earnestly to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. Christianity is a religion addressed to man as a rational being, capable of weighing the evidence of truth, and of distinguishing it from error. Thus is he addressed in the Old and New Testament, and in this character alone is he a proper subject for religious action and religious worship. Did not even the Savior point the inquiring disciples of John to the rational evidences of his messiahship? "Go," said he, "and tell John, the lame walk, the blind see,

the deaf hear, and the dead are brought to life, and to the poor the gospel is preached.” And did not Paul reason or debate with the Jews at Ephesus?*

And at Corinth, did he not reason with them in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuade both Jews and Greeks?† Evidently then it cannot be wrong for the disciples of Jesus and of Paul, to pursue the same course, to persuade men of the same truths, and to reason with the same arguments, provided the love of Christ constrain us to it, and it be performed, not in the spirit of captious and petulant impatience, and arrogance, but in love, and to edification.

Nor does any cause appear, forbidding their thus reasoning *among themselves* on points of importance, provided it be done in the same spirit. But when such controversy degenerates into strife, when the debaters suffer their malevolent passions to be excited, when they descend to personalities, and discuss persons rather than opinions, or when, like the ancient Greeks, described by Cicero,‡ they are more fond of contention than of truth, controversy becomes detrimental to the cause of religion, for the same reason as in the case of war or persecution, though in a smaller degree. The fundamental characteristic of the Savior, is that of “Prince of peace.” “Peace upon earth” is the legitimate aim and fruit of his reign. Do you object that he himself affirms, “The Son of man came not to bring peace but a

* Acts 18 : 19.

† Acts 18 : 5.

‡ De Oratore, I. 11.

sword.” We reply, he speaks only of that incidental consequence, produced by the existing depravity of men in resisting the progress of religion, which carries on a war of extermination against every manifestation of sin. Violent contention about non-essential points, is doubtless prejudicial to the progress of the gospel, and is condemned by the apostle :— Foolish and unlearned (unrevealed) questions and genealogies avoid. Peace from controversy leaves the mind unbiassed, and at liberty to attend to the claims of religion on the heart and life. Belief of the truth is doubtless important; but obedience to it is still more so. The devils believe the truth, but devils do not practice it. Polemical discussion has rarely resulted in the conversion of a sinner, and it is worthy of note, that in the history of those extended and well conducted revivals, for which New England is distinguished above all other countries, the introduction of controversy during a revival, has, in various instances, arrested the work of God, so that it is a settled principle of homiletics, that controversies, even on the most important doctrines, should not be introduced into the pulpit during a revival.

“The Spirit, like a peaceful dove,
Flies from the realms of noise and strife.”

It was whilst the disciples were engaged with one accord in prayer, that the Holy Spirit descended upon them at Pentecost, and not whilst they were distracted by discord and contention. The still small

voice of the Spirit cannot well be heard amid the noise and din of contention and strife. And that excitement of passion, so prone to accompany controversy, is supremely unfavorable to those deep and spiritual views of the turpitude and guilt of sin, of its far-reaching effects, in the moral government of God, as the transgression of moral right, as rebellion against the lawful ruler of the universe ; which lie at the basis of all genuine conviction for sin, and therefore of the genuine conversion of the sinner. Wherever revivals have co-existed with controversy in the church, that controversy was commenced not by the friends of revivals, but by their opponents, and the contentions were rather prejudicial than favorable to the cause of religion. In short, as followers of the Prince of peace, we must love peace rather than war, we should ever be exceedingly reluctant to enter the arena of sectarian strife, and only in cases of real necessity assail individually, even the enemies of the faith once delivered to the saints.

If, then, peace be so important an element of prosperity to the church of the Redeemer, the question assumes the highest importance to us my brethren :

II. How can this peace be best secured and preserved ? and may the Spirit of our divine Master conduct us into all necessary truth, that we may not be found fighting against God ?

1. *Let us place in the foreground, in our stated ministrations, the points in which we agree.*

a) Let us urge with special force and earnestness, the *cardinal* doctrines of the Reformation, yea rather of the gospel; for amidst our admiration of the blessed work wrought by the Reformers, we must not forget, that it was valuable, only because it brought us back to the gospel, and in as far as it accomplished this end. Do you ask which these doctrines are? We have the judgment of the earlier centuries in the so-called Apostles' Creed, that of the fourth century in the Nicene creed, and that of the reformers of the sixteenth century, in the points of agreement between their different creeds, set forth, *substantially*, in the celebrated *Augsburg Confession*, which Calvin also subscribed, and from which the Thirty-nine Articles of the Episcopal Church are mainly derived. Now it is admitted that error will not be blessed to the conversion of souls; and that the pious and faithful laborers of the several Evangelical Protestant denominations, have been blessed in an equal degree. Yet, is it not indisputable that on all the points of diversity, one opinion only could be right, and all the others must be erroneous? It follows, then, that it was the amount of truth held by them in common, and expressed in these general creeds, which served as the channel of divine blessing to them all. Moreover, if we examine the religious literature of the last three centuries, since the art of printing has made literature a medium of popular religious instruction; we find that the works

most blessed of heaven to the conversion of sinners and extension of the Redeemer's kingdom, were not such as abounded in minor doctrinal controversy, but practical discussions of the *cardinal* doctrines and duties of man, such as the practical works of Luther, Calvin, Arndt, Spener, Franke, Wesley, Baxter, Doddridge and others. Therefore, since heaven has stamped the seal of special divine approbation on these cardinal doctrines of the Reformation, we must ever regard them as *specially* important: and, as we happily all agree in these, it is evident that giving prominence to them must promote union amongst ourselves. In short, we believe the noble and enlightened position, recently expressed by the mother Synod of our American church, whose representatives we have the pleasure of again greeting amongst us on this occasion, to be correct, that all the different Lutheran Synods of our land are prepared for external union in this General Synod, *because they all receive the great fundamental doctrines of our beloved church*, (that is, the points of difference between them are of minor importance).* It there-

*This declaration of the Synod of Pennsylvania, thus virtually reaffirms the doctrinal basis of our General Synod, namely, absolute adherence to the bible, and fundamental assent to the Augsburg Confession. This enlightened position has long and justly been the boast of the *Protestant Episcopal Church* of England and America. A few extracts, as exemplifications, will not be unacceptable to our readers. Says *Dr. Saml. H. Turner*, the celebrated and able Professor of Biblical Literature and Interpretation, in the General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal church, New York:—

fore inevitably follows, that if such a fundamental union be a just and appropriate preparation for the advisory union contemplated by the constitution of this body, then giving prominence to these points of agreement, must tend to promote and preserve union amongst us, and such a union too, as characterized the golden ages of Christianity, such a union as tends to give glory to God in the highest, and peace amongst his children on earth.

“It is of the very highest importance to observe, that the standards should contain nothing which may not certainly be drawn from Scripture, and that their contents are limited to statements of prominent facts and doctrines, which every intelligent, religious man, may in a good degree, see for himself, to be contained in Scripture. The first part of the observation, at least, ought to be true of all ecclesiastical standards; and in proportion as it is not true, is the standard (symbolic book) erroneous.” “It follows then, that as an interpreter of holy writ, *the church does not go into detail*, and therefore cannot supersede the necessity of personal examination of the Bible on all the numerous points which such detail involves.”— “The generality which should characterize ecclesiastical standards or articles of faith (symbolical books), is strikingly illustrated in those of the church, to which, by the blessing of God, we have the happiness to belong. While some others go largely into detail, and determine doubtful points of controversial divinity, our (the Episcopal) standards of faith employ language which, in several cases, is susceptible of different shades of meaning, and, with the exception of fundamental doctrines, leaves much to the private opinion of each member. Indeed, perhaps the highest eulogy that could be passed on the compilers of those standards, is to be found in their having left so much unsaid.” p. 40, 41, of his Discourses on “God’s Word the source of divine light.” Strong and deserved as this eulogy of the doctrinal standards of the Episcopal church is, it is equally true of that of the General Synod of the American Lutheran Church; although a few of our local Synods in this country, such as that of Missouri, still cleave to the *grand error* of pro-

b) Another point of agreement is the importance of *the catechetical instruction of the rising generation*.

This excellent system finds its basis in the scriptural idea, that the family is a nursery of the church; that as in the Old Testament church the children of believers were received by circumcision, and in the New, Lydia and "*her household*," and the jailor and "*all his*" were baptized; so it is the duty of the church in all ages, to regard the promises of God as given

testant churches of the sixteenth century, *too extended creeds*, an error which by creating divisions in the Protestant ranks, and keeping alive internal dissensions in the churches, did more than all other causes to arrest the progress of the glorious Reformation.

The Congregational churches of New England, whose standards, like our own, unfortunately enter more into minor details, some of which are at present rejected by them, adopt virtually the same method as our General Synod, and limit the binding obligation of the standards to the principal doctrines of Christianity. "Though we hold, (says Dr. Woods, the Westminster) Assembly's catechism, taken as a whole, in the highest estimation, we could not with a good conscience, subscribe to every expression it contains, in relation to the doctrine of original sin. Hence, it is common for us, when we declare our assent to the catechism, to do it with an express or implied restriction. We receive the catechism *generally*, as containing a summary of the principles of Christianity. "Again, the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity, in any sense which those words naturally and properly convey, is a doctrine which we do not believe" (though taught in the creed).—Letters to Unitarians, p. 44, 45. The practice of the New School Presbyterians, is similar in regard to their confession of faith, touching limited atonement, which they reject. Yet these are confessedly amongst the most spiritual, zealous, prosperous and respected churches of our land, and we may confidently add, of the whole christian world. Those, therefore, who suppose the General Synod's qualified assent to the Augsburg Confession to be something new, not practised by other denominations, are laboring under a grievous error.

to her and her children, and to as many as the Lord her God shall call" to a knowledge of the truth. It follows, therefore, that religious instruction should not, as infidels have maintained, be deferred till adult age, when men could better judge for themselves; but that they should be guarded against the hostile influences of an ungodly world, by being reared in the nurture and admonition of the Lord from early years. Accordingly, although no catechism existed for centuries after the origin of the church, elementary instruction was early given from the Bible on the subjects now presented in our catechism, namely, the *Lord's Prayer*, the *Decalogue*, and the so-called *Apostles' Creed*; practice in this case also having preceded theory, as in many other departments of human effort.

Cyril, of Jerusalem, in the latter part of the fourth century, directs the catechumens to commit to memory the Apostles' Creed, because, says he, the church has therein condensed the principal doctrines of the Scriptures.* Several important regulations were adopted by ancient Synods, encouraging the instruction of the young, especially during the reign of Charlemagne.† Wickliff published an English Cate-

* Stäudlin's *Geschichte der Theologischen Wissenschaften*, vol. I. p. 128.

† "At the Synod of Maynze, in A. D. 818, it was resolved that the children should be punctually sent to school, or to the monks in the cloisters, or to the priests, for the purpose of instruction, and that the priests should admonish the people to learn the Sym-

chism in the fourteenth century, and Huss another in Bohemia, in the fifteenth, explaining the Lord's Prayer, the Decalogue and Apostles' Creed. In 1511 Nicolas Russ, of Rostock, published something like a catechism in German, entitled the *Threefold Cord*, containing explanations of the same topics, in which he also denied the pope's right to grant indulgences, disputed his infallibility, the propriety of image worship, the invocation of saints, and maintained that priests should pay taxes, and be subjected to the civil government, like all others.* The practical sagacity of *Luther* soon saw the importance of catechetical tuition, and led him to regard it as the most important part of public instruction.† Accordingly, in 1529 he published two catechisms, the larger as a guide to ministers, and the smaller for scholars, which soon superseded that of his friend Brentius, though it was also highly esteemed.

The influence of this instruction, imperfect as it then was, in establishing and extending the Reformation, was incalculable, and although during the thirty year's war of Papal persecution, it was most labolum (Apostles' Creed) and the prayer of our Lord, which every christian must commit it to memory." And it is added: "If any one is absolutely unable to learn it, he should learn it in his own (vernacular) language." From this it appears, that the children were required, if possible, to learn the Creed, and the Lord's prayer, in Latin.

* Stäudlin, I. p. 134.

† Stäudlin's Theol. Wissen. II, p. 258.

mentably neglected; something was subsequently done to improve its character from time to time. Yet it remained for the illustrious *Spener*, to reform and elevate, and throw new life into this part of public instruction, so as to constitute a new epoch in its history.

Our American fathers, issuing from the school of *Spener* and *Franke*, were deeply imbued with their spirit of practical piety, and no less deeply convinced of the importance of catechetical instruction of the rising generation. And here we would make the passing remark, that the literary history of the catechism in this country, is invested with special interest. Benjamin Franklin was its first printer, Provost Wrangel its first translator into English, and it is probably the first catechism ever rendered into one of the aboriginal languages of America! Instead of addressing two, or even three sermons a day, to the same people, as is now sometimes done, our fathers preached in the morning, and devoted the afternoon to the catechetical instruction of the young, not merely of the children, but of all under adult age. And it is recorded in their diaries, that the afternoon instructions were generally attended by the whole congregation, and were regarded equally as useful and blessed to the spiritual welfare of the church, as the sermons of the morning. In short, they seem to have given a species of familiar lectures on the chief doctrines and duties of religion, taking the catechism as their basis, and keeping up

the interest by occasional questions to be answered by the audience. This method of preaching was practiced with great success by the distinguished Lutheran Missionary, Swartz, among the Tamuls; and it is a subject worthy of serious inquiry to us all, whether the second service of the Lord's day would not be more interesting and useful, if conducted in this manner. At all events, as the history of our church so strikingly demonstrates the value of this custom, and as we all approve and practice it, let us continue to practice and improve it, both in the case of children and of catechumens in preparation for sacramental communion, also for the additional reason that it promotes union and sympathy of feelings amongst our churches. For myself, I have no hesitation in pronouncing it, when properly conducted, one of the most important features of the Lutheran church.

c) Another point of agreement amongst us, is the *religious celebration of these historical festivals*, commemorating the cardinal facts of the Savior's life, and the foundation of his church, such as his birth, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, and the effusion of his Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It is true, in a few sections of our American church, these festivals are not commemorated as we think they ought to be. And as our church does not rest the observance of these days on divine appointment, there must be liberty in the matter. Yet we know of no Lutheran,

who actually disapproves of their celebration, the principal objection being the difficulty of securing the popular attendance in some places. Hence as the custom is one easily vindicated at the bar of reason, and pretty generally observed, we think the continued and universal religious observation of these festivals, would tend to unity and sympathy among our churches. The objection drawn from their multiplicity in the Romish, and even in the earlier Lutheran church, does not apply to us. At the time of the Reformation, many festivals were dropped in Germany. The Synod of Orebro, in Sweden, as early as 1529, resolved greatly to reduce their number. In the different portions of Germany, various restrictions were at different times imposed, especially during the last century. When our fathers gave organic form to our church in this country, they reduced the festivals nearly to the present number. The propriety of their observance is manifest from the fact, that Christianity, as a revelation from God, is based upon these cardinal events, which, being addressed to the senses, are intelligible to the populace, and therefore important to be known by them. Every minister ought therefore, to preach on each of these events at least once a year, and as this will often be neglected, unless some such custom exist, its utility and importance are manifest.

d) The occasional and optional use of a Liturgy of moderate length, may also foster union amongst

us. Such a liturgy our American church has always possessed, since ten years after the arrival of father Muhlenberg in this country. The one formed by him and his fellow-laborers, was not more than half as long as that recently published, and its use, if we mistake not, was always confined to the morning service. If, then, we would walk in the footsteps of our fathers, we must abridge rather than extend our liturgy. Such a work has its advantages as a directory, especially to young ministers, who may either read it, or impress its substance on their memory, and follow its general train of thought, in public worship, as well as in funeral, consecration, and other services. Thus employed, it confers substantial uniformity on the worship of our churches. Its use should be varied, and alternate with extemporaneous prayer; because extended and stereotyped forms, of incessant recurrence, unavoidably tend to formality of worship in the multitude, whilst it is admitted that some pious souls may sustain their attention, and be edified throughout the service. Its use must moreover be *optional*, because it is destitute of scriptural authority, and one grand principle of Lutheranism, as taught in the Augsburg Confession, is that it is not necessary to the unity of the church, that the same rites and ceremonies instituted by men, should be every where observed,* and hence the Constitution of our General Synod explicitly enjoins it on its

* Augsburg Confession, Art. VII.

members as a duty, "to be extremely careful, that the consciences of ministers be not burdened with human inventions, laws or devices, and that no one be oppressed by reason of differences of opinion on non-fundamental doctrines."* In the earliest ages of Christianity the ministers and members of each congregation regulated their own ceremonies and modes of worship. Prayer was extemporaneous, not even the Lord's prayer having been ordinarily used before the second century.† The most learned and recent investigations confirm the opinion, that written prayers as well as liturgies, were introduced generally in the fourth and fifth centuries, as auxiliaries to feeble ministers, amid the decline of learning in the Roman empire.‡ Still as their moderate use possesses obvious advantages, and tends to unity, we regard it the duty of the church to recommend such use.

3. The peace or rest of the church will be promoted by our exercising a *scriptural charity*, or *forbearance towards each other, on points of non-essential difference*. How far then may this Christian charity and forbearance extend? Certainly not to fundamentals, but to non-fundamentals, not to points essential to salvation or to the Gospel system, but to

* Constitution of Gen. Syn. Art. III, Sect. § 1.

† See Siegel's Handbuch Christlich-kirchlicher Alterthümer, vol. IV, p. 581.

‡ ib. vol. III, p. 205. Also Coleman's Christian Antiquities, pp. 213-216.

such topics of doctrine or practice, on which those who love the Lord indeed may honestly differ. Thus judged the churches of the earlier centuries, which confined their absolute requisitions to those cardinal truths of the Gospel, exhibited in the so-called Apostles' Creed, and at a later day, the fourth century, in the Nicene Creed, with an express declaration on the part of Athanasius, the Coryphæus of the Nicene Council, that this creed was then sufficient for the subversion of all impiety, and for the establishment of all godliness, and of the faith in Christ.* The Scriptures do not decide with absolute clearness those questions, which, since the Reformation, have been made points of denominational diversity; and hence God having not furnished the means of preventing it, must be supposed to allow this difference of opinion, and we have no right to do less. Could not any one of you, my brethren, in a space not larger than one of the minor epistles of Paul or of John, compose a statement of our faith, which should settle for ever the question, whether you believed in conditional or unconditional election, in limited or general atonement, in pedobaptism or anti-pedobaptism, in episcopacy or ministerial parity, in a literal or figurative presence of the Savior in the eucharist, in short, a statement exhibiting, beyond

* Ἡ γάρ ἐν αὐτῇ παρα τῶν πατέρων κατὰ τὰς θείας γραφὰς ὁμολογηθεῖσα πίστις, ἀντάρχης ἐστὶ πρὸς ἀναστροφὴν μὲν πάσης ἀσεβείας, συντάσιν δὲ τῆς εὐσεβείας ἐν Χριστῷ πίστέως."

controversy, your faith in regard to all the points of difference between the several evangelical denominations? Now, if any intelligent divine could do this, could not Paul himself have done it? And would he not, if inspiration had so directed him? As however, neither he, nor any other inspired writer has presented us such a statement, we justly infer that God designed liberty and charity on these points, and we also are bound to exercise them. We are commanded by the apostle Paul, who though a flaming and intolerant bigot in his youth, had been transformed, by the Spirit, into “a new creature,” “to receive him that is weak in the faith (him, who in our judgment is in error on some points); but not to doubtful disputations,” not for the purpose of disputing about his scruples or deciding on them. “Again, let every one be fully persuaded in his own mind.” “Again, why dost thou judge (that is, condemn) thy brother? — for we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ.” Paul warns his son Timothy against doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof come envy, strifes, railing, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds,” &c. Again, “Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord, that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers.” And, yet again, “follow *charity, peace*, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart: but foolish and unlearned (*απαιδευτους*

untaught) questions (questions which had not been decided by the apostles), avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes.” Here then, we have the great and sublime principle of gospel unity inculcated, *uniformity in fundamentals, and charity or liberty in non-fundamentals*. This is the rule of Christian charity in general; nor should we suffer our charity or forbearance to those of our own denomination, to be restricted within narrower limits, except on those points in which diversity is inconsistent with harmonious co-operation, such as forms of government and discipline. In attachment to the grand principles of Lutheran government and ecclesiastical organization we are all agreed. Whilst, therefore, we hold the great doctrines of the Reformation, as substantially set forth in the venerable *Augsburg Confession*, we not only safely may exercise charity towards one another, but are under obligation to do so, an obligation dictated by the word of God, and pledged by the Constitution of our General Synod. My brethren, it is but for a brief term, that we dwell as pilgrims upon earth, and mingle in the passing conflicts of church and state. Let us avoid all unnecessary controversy, and conduct that which duty may demand, in the Spirit of Christ.* Soon we are to go hence, to render account of our stewardship. Let us therefore, endeavor to rise

* It is recorded of the celebrated Lutheran Theologian *Jno. Gerhard*, whom Glassius terms “*virum omnium calculo in theosophia*

above the atmosphere of personal and of sectarian strife to the pure and vital air of the gospel. Let us imbibe the spirit of the Master's, prayer, "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they *may be one* as we are." —And again, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also, who shall believe on me through their word, that they *all may be one*, as thou Father art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." Let us therefore, love one another, and love our own Church. But whilst we do so, let us not forget that we are disciples of Him who said: "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." Let us therefore, not love Luther less, but Christ more. Let us not glory in particular men, for they are all our's, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, (and we may add, Luther and Calvin and Wesley), all are our's, and we are Christ's, and Christ is God's." By pursuing this course, and exercising this charity towards one another, as the churches of the General Synod have done for thirty years with the happiest results, we shall secure that peace, which, as our text affirms, tends to edification and "the growth of the church."

4. *Finally*, we shall promote the peace and increase of the church by laboring with united efforts *et σεοσεβεια maximum*," that although he was frequently attacked by Albert Grawer, in his public discourses, he could never be induced to make any reply, or enter into controversy with him." Gottf. Arnold's Kirchen- u. Ketzler-Geschichte, B. 17, Cap. 6, § 34.

to advance the cause of genuine piety in the churches, and by engaging them actively in the great Christian enterprises of the day.

The more pious the church is, the fewer errorists will ordinarily arise, and the less disposition for heresy-hunting will be exhibited. Piety guards men against the disposition to be wise above what is written, and to indulge in speculations on unrevealed topics ; and it is this disposition, which usually gives rise to heresies. Piety also throws the mantle of charity over minor differences, and at the same time urges to a prompt and faithful discipline of fundamental errorists, thus preventing their growth and suppressing their influence.

Piety is, moreover, an essential feature of discipleship of that Redeemer, who is Prince of peace, and came to proclaim peace upon earth and good will to men. Without holiness no one shall see God. As all men are by nature and practice sinners ; unless a man be born again, be converted from sin to holiness, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven. The grand object of ministers and congregations should be, to admit none but sincere professors into the church, men who have experienced a change of heart, and who adorn the doctrines they profess by a well-ordered conversation. The various means of grace and privileges of the church, are designed to promote this spiritual renovation and sanctification, are useful mainly as they effect this end. Let us

therefore, my brethren, unitedly set our faces against dead formality in religion, as the mere form of godliness without its living power, as a grand enemy to the peace and prosperity of the church. Let us employ every scriptural means to call sinners to repentance. Let us sound in the ears of mere nominal professors, the solemn admonition of the Savior: "Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father, who is in heaven." The world, we know, lieth in wickedness, and the friendship of the world is enmity against God. Hence, when there is little or no perceptible difference between the external members of any church and the surrounding world, in their avowed principles and habits of action, there *must be* something wrong in the standard of piety. It falls short of the gospel requisitions and we should make renewed effort for its improvement. Yea, we should labor and pray for the effusion of the Holy Spirit, that every congregation might be visited by a pentecostal season of revival, that God might be glorified and sinners saved. And it will be found that the peace and harmony of the church, will be proportioned to the degree in which her members acquire the same mind which was in Christ Jesus.

As a further means of promoting the peace of the church, of improving the piety of professors, and of glorifying God, let every church be actively engaged

in the great benevolent operations of the day. Man is constitutionally active, and this is the case as well after conversion as before it. Unless a minister gives his new converts employment in the work of the Lord, satan will be sure to enlist them in his service. At first he may immerse them in merely secular though moral employments, to give them no time for religious duties; but soon they will find themselves engaged in enterprises more directly hostile to the cause of God. Thus also the congregation constantly engaged in active efforts to do good, is far less in danger of being inveigled in intestine feuds, than one that is formal and inactive. And the same will doubtless be the case with an entire religious denomination. Thus our Moravian brethren, who have been actively engaged in the missionary work ever since their organization in 1727, have never been disturbed by contentions and heresies, and the same fact might be observed in the history of other denominations. Religious activity, in short, leaves a church no time for contention, and practically impresses on us the truth, that doing good is more important and more blessed than heresy-hunting.

It is also worthy of remark, that although the obligation to contend for the faith is elsewhere inculcated, the great, final commission of the Savior is silent on this subject: and the grand duty enjoined on the ministry of all ages, is the conversion of the

whole world, "the preaching of the gospel to every creature," "the making disciples of all nations." Let us therefore, look abroad over the church, and over the world, and inquire, what are the master vices which present the strongest barriers to the Redeemer's kingdom; and how can they be most successfully removed. What are the grand enterprises, called for by the providential indications of the age, to carry forward the aggressive movements of the church of Christ? What have we done, and how much more can we accomplish for the cause of the Bible, missions foreign and domestic, of tracts, of beneficiary education, of sabbath schools, of church extension, of temperance? In short, let us inquire among ourselves, and of those stationed in foreign lands,

Watchmen tell us of the night,
What the signs of promise are.

And, remembering that the field is the whole world, and availing ourselves of all the providential aid afforded, in the history of the church, in the progress of science, in the recent development of events, let us engage in efforts worthy of the cause we profess to have espoused, and the means which providence has confided to us. Then, beloved brethren, may we hope for the signal blessing of heaven upon our Church, then may we expect peace to prevail throughout our borders, then will our noble Lutheran Zion be justly admired, not only as the Church of

the Reformation, but also of the Millennium. And then, happy thought! when we shall have finished our pilgrimage on earth, shall we be admitted to that higher rest which remaineth for the people of God, and be welcomed by the delightful plaudit: "*Well done, good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*"

"Finally, brethren, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you." Amen.